



The metaphor of 'walking in love' as matrix for the familial relationships in Ephesians 5:22-6:9

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Abstract

In this study the Social Identity Theory serves as a tool to provide a theoretical framework for exploring group processes in the Letter to the Ephesians and is fundamental for the discursive processes to determine group identity. According to the SIT the focus of attention is the 'in-group model and the ultimate other' which both feature in the positioning of the discourse of the cultural boundaries. It is also a requirement that groups would provide their members with a positive in-group identity that derives from comparative observations between social groups.

This article employs the metaphor of 'walking in love' (Eph 5:2) and its contextual meanings to explain the social dynamics of the relations between members of the Christian household, resulting in an alternative construction of household identity. Walking or living in love and living wisely) suggest mutuality rather than hierarchy in the Christian community. The concept of 'walking in or with' will be used to challenge the hierarchical structure of household identity. The concept is further used to show the type of social interaction expected between members of the Christian community. It is the church's responsibility, as they walk in love, to ensure that Christians demonstrate the same kind of love freely to all people.

Keywords: Ephesians 5:22-6:9, walk (*peripatéō*), walking in love, mutuality, familial relationships.

Introduction

The metaphor of 'walking' or 'to walk' (Greek: *peripatéō*) is used throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures to indicate 'moving along (accompanying) or making one's way' (Fitssimmonds, 1978:1314). In some contexts it has a specific meaning, but in general it means to associate oneself closely with someone or something, for example to walk with God (Gen 5:22, 24, 6:9) or to keep the law (Lk 1:6), but also in a negative sense to associate with sins or a sinful life (2 Cor 4:2). It also has the meaning of moving forward with a specific goal or in a specific direction, in contrast with 'standing' which indicates a stationary position or stagnation. In the context of Ephesians, the author uses the metaphor of walking (*peripatéō*) several times (Eph 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2,8, 15-6:9, Eph 5:18-6:9) to demarcate the borders between insider and outsider groups and to encourage distinctive and shared ethical values within the Christian faith community.

The rhetorical structure of Ephesians is based on the prevalence of the idea of walking (*peripatéō*), essentially dividing the final half of the letter into five sections around the only five occurrences of *peripatéō* located in chapters 4-6 (Hoehner, 2002): The believers are called upon to walk worthily (Eph 4:2) in the unity of the body (4:1-16); they are told not to walk (4:17) like Gentiles typically do (4:17-32) because Gentiles form part of the out-group; believers are rather to be part of the in-group by being imitators of God (5:1) by walking in love (5:1-17) and walking in the light (5:8) and exposing evil deeds (5:8-14); and finally they are to walk wisely in



relationships by the Spirit (5:15-6:9). By doing this the believers' identity is known to be part of the in-group.

This article employs the metaphor of 'walking in love' (Eph 5:2) and its contextual meanings in order to explain the social dynamics of the relations between members of the Christian household, resulting in an alternative construction of the household identity.

...walk *in love* (έν ἀγάπῃ),
just as Christ also loved (καθώς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν) you
and gave Himself up for (καὶ παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπέρ) us... (Eph. 5:2).

Walking or living in love and living wisely suggest mutuality rather than hierarchy in the Christian community. The concept of 'walking in or with' will be used to challenge the hierarchical structure of household identity. Botha (1998:20) confirms the following in a statement:

Most of us live most of the time within the power of models of which we are unaware. The models are part of a paradigm, an entire set of assumptions about what we believe we do, or like to do. Such paradigms are simply the basic conventions, largely unquestioned, which the establishment of a society in its religious, political, economic and educational institutions defends and into which it initiates the young.

Therefore, the study aims to apply the *Social Identity Theory* to distinguish the identity of the members of the in-group, namely the Christian household from the out-group, the gentiles (cf. Darko, 2008:31-70). This distinctiveness is based on the groups' social values, attitudes and beliefs and will be identified and utilised to constitute their respective identities.

The concept of domestic codes (*Haustafeln*)

The Ephesians' *Haustafeln* (Eph 5:21-6:9) is a domestic code in the familiar three parts: wives and husbands (5:21-33), children and parents (6:1-4), and slaves and masters (6:5-9). The household (or family) functioned as the foundational unit of the state in antiquity, and was supported by household codes that served as a model for the political order. Martin Luther was the first to refer to this scheme as *Haustafeln*, which govern members' behaviour within the household and the broader society (Carson, 1960:135ff.).

The metaphor of 'walking in love', as used in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 in connection with these three familial relationships, helps us to understand these relationships in a non-hierarchical and distinctively Christian way. The hierarchical relationships reflected in the household codes instigate power relationships that equalises the man as husband, father and master with Christ as head of the Christian Church, to function as the sole model for the household. Alternatively and subversively to these hierarchical power relationships, this study aims to employ the metaphor of "walking in love" (Eph 5:2) and its contextual meanings in order to activate the social dynamics of the interrelatedness between the members of the household, allowing an alternative, non-hierarchical construction of the household identity.

The author of Ephesians introduced a new element into his household codes; namely the Christian home was to be different to the typical Graeco-Roman family. Every member of the Christian household was to live under the Lordship of Christ, which revolutionized all relationships (including domestic ones). The Ephesians' household instructions therefore interrogates traditional social roles in order, harmony and unity (Brown, 1988:57). The author of Ephesians draws together both theological and ethical concerns in relation to God's purpose of bringing all things together in unity in Christ (Eph 1:9, 10).



εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν
τῷ Χριστῷ τὰ τε ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

Aristotle (1958) was of the opinion that a healthy society depended on the orderly functioning of households. Domestic codes (addressed to the male heads of households) were therefore meant to order the functioning of the different members of the household in terms of roles and duties that would enable them to be good, law-abiding citizens.

In the New Testament, the concept of 'household' functions in a variety of contexts, such as general admonitions to Christian communities (see 1 Pet 3:1-7; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-25) (cf. Sanders 2002:399-405). It forms the basic cell of the Christian movement, and its nucleus is often an existing household. Pauline communities metaphorically speak of themselves as family, using the rhetoric of kinship and affection, of belonging, blessing and mutuality.

Throughout the teachings of the Gospels, especially Luke and Acts, 'the household serves as the most apposite sphere ... of social life for illustrating features of life under the reign of God ... The boundaries of this symbolical family or household of God are expanded to include the marginalized, outcasts, Samaritans, and Gentiles' (Elliot, 1991:227).

Members of the household of God are to see themselves as being of equal standing in Christ (Eph 2:11-22), and to relate to one another in an appropriate manner – humbly and gently, patiently, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit, and serving one another (4:1-16). In the same way, the household codes are framed with injunctions to 'submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (5:21), and to remember that 'there is no favouritism with him' (6:9). Each one is to subordinate themselves to the other.

'Walking' in the context of Ephesians

The eulogy of Ephesians 1:3-14, announces the thrust of the letter as a celebration of God's gracious blessings for all people in Christ: "...who has blessed (*eulogeo*) us with every spiritual blessing (*eulogia*) in the heavenly places in Christ" (v. 3b). Paul ascribed blessings or praise to God (v. 3a) in response to the blessings that God bestowed on us—"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (v. 3b).

The essence of Ephesians 1-3 (a new humanity in relation to Christ and fellow-believers) is thus explicated in terms of a life worthy of one's calling (4:1). Recipients of the letter are encouraged to walk wisely, so that the presence of God may be experienced, and so that God may be worshipped and praised. This is the God who destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between Jewish and Gentile Christians, the God of peace, the God with whom there is no favouritism. The present imperatives following Ephesians 5:18 ('Be filled with the Spirit...') indicate a process of continuous moral formation in accordance with the community's new identity in Christ. They are to live as God's newly established people in peace and unity, healed and reconciled by the power of the triune God's self-giving love.

The believers are urged not to walk as the Gentiles do, which implies that the walk of the Gentiles is contrary to the laws of God. The author begins this paranetic section of the letter with a series of exhortatory units concerning how his audience is 'to walk' (Snodgrass 1996:229). In Ephesians 4:1, 'I, then, exhort you, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,' is illustrative of the in-group. On the other hand, 'This then I say and testify in the Lord that you no longer walk just as also the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind' (Eph 4:17), which is characteristic of the out-group. In Ephesians 5:1-2, it is said '(b)ecome then imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love just as also the Christ loved us'; Eph 5:7-8, 'Do not then become fellow shares with them, walk as children of the light.'

And now in Ephesians 5:15, continuing 'then' and 'walk' according to the pattern, the author exhorts the recipients to '(w)atch then how carefully you walk, not as unwise but wise.' Although often understood as being in the indicative mood, 'walk' in the exhortation to 'watch then how carefully you walk' (5:15b) seems to carry an imperative sense not only as a continuation of the previous uses 'walk in love' (5:2), but also as embedded within a series of imperatives beginning with 'watch' in 5:15a and continuing throughout 5:15-18. Thus, we might translate it as 'watch then how carefully you are to walk'. Furthermore, the instruction that the recipients is to walk not 'as' unwise (15:5b) develops the previous imperatives that they are to walk 'as' children of the light (5:8) and as beloved children 'in love' (5:1-2).

Christ's sacrifice also changes the dynamics in the life and relationships in the family to 'walk in love', as depicted in Ephesians 5:21-6:9. It is noticeable that relationships in the family are put into the context of their discipleship, and the relationship of being 'in Christ' allows members to act and deal with one another as they embrace this love.

Mutuality in the Christian household

This reading of Ephesians suggests mutuality rather than hierarchy in the Christian household and in the community. However, does the language of mutuality and submission in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 challenge, re-describe, or re-assert the conventional connotations and contexts of a hierarchically ordered morality? Does it offer a prophetic vision for the relationship between Christ and the church or society, and of human dignity as an expression of God's image? Or does it reinforce a cultural-patriarchal pattern of subordination by describing reality, by potentially re-imposing a form of subtle and faith-sanctioned sexist hegemony, and thereby contradicting the received Pauline baptismal tradition of Gal 3:28?

As a general injunction and motivation, Ephesians 5:21 and 6:9b respectively seem to frame the household code, thereby offering a possible reinterpretation of its patriarchal structure from a christological perspective. The author encourages Christians to relinquish their claims to hierarchical status out of their respect for Christ. Fee (1994:676) says the following:

Such a revolutionary statement was not intended to abolish the structures [of Roman society], which were held in place by Roman law. Rather it was intended forever to do away with the significance attached to such structural differences, which pitted one group of human beings against another.

Note that the author of Ephesians used the imperative case in his address to all five of the other family members: husbands (Eph 5:28), children (6:2), fathers (6:4), slaves (6:5), and masters (6:9). The question that arises is what does 'submit' mean in this context? Voluntary mutual submission between husband and wife is the principle upon which Christian marriage is built. The author's statement in Ephesians 5:21 is an outflow of 5:18b, 'Be filled with the spirit.' Spirit-filled living transforms the Christian home. The New Testament calls believers to be servants ('slaves') to one another without distinctions of status or gender (Gal. 5:13).

In Ephesians the author illustrates the principle of mutual submission in three areas: husband-wife (5:22-33), parent-child (6:1-4), and master-slave (6:5-9). Addressing the less powerful person in each section, the author offers wives, children, and slaves hope and the possibility of transformation. This is made possible in the following ways: In marriage, mutual submission is voluntary as unto the Lord and is joined with self-sacrificing love; in parenting, it combines obedience and nurture; and in the slavery relationship, it results in a mutuality that is radically out of place in that culture.

Best (1998:515-516) attaches Ephesians 5:21 to the previous section, and the grammatical structure of the passage supports this view. Submitting is one of five participles in Ephesians

5:19-21 that qualify the idea of being filled. Therefore, submitting to one another is a description of being filled with the Spirit – not only speaking, singing, making melody and giving thanks in corporate worship, but also submitting to one another in the fear of Christ. The theme of submission dominates the household code not only in the area of submitting (5:24), but also where the concepts of fear (5:33; 6:5), honour (6:2), and obedience (6:1, 5) appear. This grammatical attachment eases the transition to the new section, but the substance of this verse, with its focus on submission, means that it is best taken with what follows, and should be understood as an introduction to Ephesians 5:22ff (Dawes, 1998:18-21). Since Christ's self-sacrificing grace and love (1:7; 5:2, 25) are integral to his authority, this fear must be tempered with a knowledge of the incomprehensible vastness of his love (3:18-19). The author gives instructions to each member of the three traditional pairs, and in each case begins with the subordinate member of the pair. Wives are addressed as equal to husbands in the responsibility they bear for their behaviour.

In the Ephesian *paraenesis*, Ephesians 5:21 is a transitional verse indicating that the exhortations about household relationship form the major part of the *paraenesis* about wise living that began in Ephesians 5:15. Thus, 'the primary resource for such living is the Spirit, with whom believers are to be filled, resulting in mutual edification, worship, constant thanksgiving, and mutual submission', and 'the exhortation to mutual submission forms a transition between the preceding injunctions in 5:15-20 and the instructions to wives and husbands in 5:22-33' (Lincoln 1990:385). Indeed, the participle in 5:21 is dependent on the main verb, 'be filled' in 5:18 and, in turn, the exhortation to wives in 5:22 is dependent on this participle for its sense, since it contains no verb. Thus, as Wessels (1989:71) points out with reference to Barth and Roberts, for grammatical and syntactical reasons, 5:21 belongs to 5:18-21 (in which five successive participles are attached to the imperative, 'Be filled with the Holy Spirit'), but at the same time the content of 5:21 forms an essential part of 5:22-33. The verses that follow 5:21 consequently flow directly out of it, and any attempt to isolate the instruction to wives to submit to their husbands from the general admonition to submit to one another violates the intention of the whole passage.

In general, therefore, Ephesians 5:21 provides a link between the discussion of relationships in the body of Christ, or God's household, and relationships in the domestic household, and consequently 5:21 stands as a general heading for the whole of the household code in Ephesians. The remainder of the verses (5:22-33) contain specific instructions to both husbands and wives, on how they should walk through the act of love, and how husbands should love their wives.

A particular emphasis in the construction of the believers' new identity in Ephesians is their new status 'in Christ', an expression which occurs 34 times in the six chapters of the letter and describes the 'corporate solidarity of believers with their resurrected and exalted Lord' (Arnold, 1995:247). The identity of the Christians is integrally tied up with the notion that they are now 'in Christ', and that this new identity is to transform their perspective on every aspect of their lives.

The Christian in-group is characterised by being 'in Christ'. Parsons (1988:25) says that this concept is used more than 216 times in the writings of Paul. Its primary implication is an objective one, related as it is to the historical person of Christ and the believer's present relationship to him.

Best (1995:186) explains this as follows: 'The formula describes the relationship of the believer to Christ, but it does more: it implies a relationship of Christians one to another in personal fellowship and all together in Christ.'

What does Christian love mean?



In order to unpack Ephesians 5:21-6:9 we need to have a clear understanding of the discussion on love as reflected in the scriptures in general from a Christian perspective. Jesus is reported to have taught that the greatest commandment is to 'love the Lord your God...' and the second to that is to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Mat 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31; cf. Luke 10:27-28). Loving God is clearly the most important act that one can perform as a Christian, the second being the act of loving one's neighbour as oneself. However, before one can begin to pursue the attainment of these commandments one needs to understand what it means to love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 provides an explanation of what love is, and the ideas contained there are often understood to constitute *agape* (God-given) love (Beck, 2012:167). One can therefore conclude that the enactment of *agape* love towards God and fellow human beings is the key to abiding by the commandments in Matthew 22:37-40. We exercise our 'walking' in practising this kind of love. This *agape* is the force behind all forms of love, and allows us to love others. This love is the power that moves us to be kind, gentle, patient and hopeful. Love is a principle that directs people, so that they promote order in the entire realm of God's world. This love is also demonstrated in the believers 'walking in love' towards others.

But, the 'walking in love' does not start with the local church. The household is the most essential unit in society, and according to Ephesians the relationship between husband and wife demonstrates 'walking in love' as the primary relationship that should be imitated by the members of the local and universal church. The author of Ephesians wants to establish a distinctive ethos based on love and respect for the dignity of others. This ethos is based on the in-groups' social values, attitudes and beliefs, and constitutes their identity. This further serves to persuade the out-group to migrate to the in-group and become the new people of God.

This 'walking in love' is demonstrated in interpersonal and interracial relationships in the church (Eph 2:11-22), which is made possible by the individual being 'in Christ'. The love that Christ exhibits is self-giving (Eph 5:25.), and the corporate life of the Christian community is to be the social embodiment of the self-giving and loving Christ. The author suggests that by responsible self-giving and loving service to each other, those who are 'in Christ' 'will fulfil the law of Christ'. 'The law of Christ' is a bold metaphor for the manner in which love, originating in the Spirit, now becomes the guiding force in Christian life (Esler, 2006:23). This kind of love is given substance by Karl Rahner's concept of love as mutuality and communion, which contrasts with Nygren's definition of *agape* as self-sacrifice (Pope, 1991:257).

In Beck's (2012) discussion on love, in particular love for others, he questions whether self-love is a pre-requisite or an obstacle to loving others. He argues that although on the one hand Luther regards self-love as sinful (Beck, 2012:171), in order for one to love others in a healthy and positive manner one must have a healthy regard and love for the self.

Parker (1962:754) makes two points about New Testament love. First, he speaks of it as a basic response to the prior love of God and as the acceptance of the Spirit's work in a person's innermost being. Second, this love finds its expression in three main ways: love for fellow-believers, the evangelism of those outside the church, and patience in times of trial. It is the first of these three 'loves' that deserves greatest consideration. It is a love that is qualitatively different from 'other loves' (Morris 1971:633), because it signifies a new relationship that has been formed among Christ's closest followers on the basis of his love for them. Everyone finds their identity in this kind of love.

Paul was the greatest advocate of love for one another in the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor 13). In Romans, Paul wrote the following:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The commandments; "you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not covet", and any other commandments



are summed up in this sentence, “you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:8-10).

The author of Ephesians says: ‘I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love’ (Eph 4:1-2). Love therefore becomes the fulfilment of the law, and in our walking we demonstrate our willingness to fulfil the law.

Walking in love in Ephesians 5:21-6:9

In Ephesians 5:28-29 the aspect of ‘feeding’ and ‘caring’ is taken up to further emphasise the attitude being advocated, for the husband’s love is likened to his care for his own body: ‘Just as a husband cares for his body’s needs, so his love for his wife should be of the sort that cares for her needs and facilitates her growth and development’ (Lincoln, 1990:378). In Ephesians 5:29 we have the image of the husband feeding and caring for his own body likened to Christ nourishing and cherishing his body, the church, of which he is the head, as was earlier pointed out in 5:23. Thus, as Girard (2000:142) points out, ‘in this sense “head” should be understood in the moral and sociological sense of “responsibility”, rather than as an anthropological and philosophical observation on the respective nature of man and women.’ It is a headship that takes responsibility.

As Christ feeds and cares for his church, likewise the man does the same (Eph 5:29), and this is the responsibility of the man. His authority stems from mutual and equal recognition and appreciation. Miletic (1988:181) describes it as follows: ‘the tension between human dignity and dehumanizing androcentric found at Ephesians 5:22-23 could be described as a collision of two worldviews, where the brilliance of agapic love pushes the darkness of domination and oppression into retreat’. The primary goal of God is to unite all under the headship of Christ (1:10).

The serious charge to husbands in the Ephesian household code thus ‘retains the formal headship of husband over wife, but in effect it calls for a radical subordination (the word not used) of husband to wife’ (Stagg, 1979:546).

In the instruction to men to ‘love’ their wives, the author urges men to treat their wives with *agape* love, which is selfless, caring concern. In urging that a man care about his wife as he does for himself, the author seriously challenges patriarchal models of marriage (Eph 5:28). The passage continues through to verse 30:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her [26] in order that he might sanctify her [the church], cleansing her with the washing of the water of the word, [27] so as to present the church to himself in glory, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind but in order that it might be holy and unblemished. [28] In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [29] For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does for the church, [30] because we are members of his body.

The author of Ephesians presented a very different perspective that is reflected in Lee-Barnewall’s essay, ‘Turning the body/head on its head’ (Lee-Barnewall, 2013). Rather than the wife sacrificing herself for her husband (her head), the author admonished the husband to sacrifice himself for her (v.25). Though certainly the wife is to love her husband, the emphasis given here is for the husband, as the head, to love his wife. Though the husband is to be in a position of authority over his wife, it is a type of authority never seen before or since (apart from Christ).



According to Pieterse (1991:47) the conduct and behaviour of the marriage couple is put under the spotlight. The couple's relationship with and service to the work of God plays a pivotal role in the everyday lives of people. Furthermore, Pieterse (1991:44-46) says that it is specifically the verbal and communicative behaviour of the couple in service of the gospel that is important. Through this form of communication couples give substance and meaning to their lives. Louw (1996:23) refers to this as a universal way in which marriage realises itself. We need to ask what role the church plays in all of this.

The role of the church in demonstrating 'walking in love'

It is the task of the church in a postmodern era to demonstrate love and care to the world (Nel 1996:1). It is the Christians' responsibility, as they walk in love, to ensure that they demonstrate the same kind of love freely to all people. Love is the essence of life and if this is the basis for your existence then it is vital that it is protected and simultaneously used as a change agent. If love resides in you (1 John 4:16; 10:30; 15:4), then everyone's dignity is valued and respected.

The walking in love imagery is further enhanced in society through the social interaction of individuals. There is a part of society, however, that unconsciously treats others as instruments of gain. This is a belief instilled over a long period of time through the family and the education system as they prepare an individual for the world of work (Horsthemke et al., 2013). According to Mchunu (2015:18), human rights is representative of aspirations for a higher order of human practices as a new culture. The symbol of the Afrikaner Laager, which provided shelter to a selected group, was dismantled and replaced by the 'rainbow nation', a new symbol for a new South Africa. The question that arises is how does South Africa embrace this kind of love?

Mwambazambi (2012:5) mentions that the church's mission must promote social cohesion, peace, justice, reconciliation, good governance, love of God and love of one's neighbour. The church mirrors this kind of love in the way Christians walk, accepting everyone irrespective of gender, race, colour or creed. As we walk in love, these attributes of love reflect who we are. According to Claassens (2011:37), the divine image of God is associated with justice.

Koopman (2007:181) understood this concept very well when he proposed that:

Human dignity is an inalienable dignity. It is indelible. It is a mark put on us by the love of God that permeates our being to the core. This dignity does not have to be earned. It cannot be lost. It is intimately mine and it is far more enduring than any of my characteristics.

Claassens (2011:39) notes that 'human dignity is inherently relational rather than individualistic in its orientation'. Therefore, in our interaction with others as we 'walk in love' we give meaning to the human dignity afforded to human beings. True dignity can only be realised when it is understood in relation to others.

The quality of this love is integral to the reality that is promoted in Ephesians. As Cousar (1996:173) points out, 'unlike many discussions of self-identity, the message of Ephesians avoids being narcissistic.' The readers are repeatedly told that God's calling for the church is that it lives for something beyond itself – 'for the praise of his glory' (Eph 1:12, 14). Indeed, as Lincoln (1993:153) asserts, 'the vision of the Church in Ephesians is of a community of forgiving and accepting love based on its experience of God's forgiving and accepting love in Christ (cf. 4:32-5:2).' And '(t)he communicative, transformative power of the Ephesians epistle lies in its potential ability to persuade its readers toward inhabiting its alternative moral world' (Mouton, 2002:121-122).



The author exhorts the Ephesian church to walk in love. The one to follow, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, has also walked in God's love. The author re-enforces this by saying: 'And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour' (KJV Eph 5:2; Col 1:8).

The walking in love metaphor is further illustrated in children's obedience to parents, and parents modelling the kind of love that is spoken of in Ephesians 6:1-4. The scriptures clearly encourage children to 'honour your father and mother' (Exod 20:12).

White notes that: 'Parents are entitled to a degree of love and respect which is due to no other person' (1958:308). Children need to show respect and love to their parents who have brought them into the world in love. God's law of love demands that children love and honour their parents (which is the first law with a promise). This reciprocal love between a parent and a child finds its fulfilment in the walking in love.

After addressing the relationships of wives to husbands (Eph 5:21-33) and children to parents (Eph 6:1-4), the author turns to slaves and masters, elaborating on what it means for members of households to submit to one another in respect for Christ (5:21), as a result of and in response to being filled by the Spirit (5:18). Lincoln (1990:421) explains: '(i)n their service to their masters, slaves are to see the opportunity to serve Christ and to perform their work as if they were doing it for Christ'. In the ancient world, masters controlled their slaves through fear, since it was believed that fear produced greater loyalty. The perspective of Christian slaves, however, has changed. They have been delivered from the bondage of human intimidation, and now are enslaved to the Lord Jesus Christ. Their service to their master, then, is to be rendered out of reverence and awe for Christ. The author does not mean that masters should obey their slaves (Eph 6:5), but three considerations should be adhered to. First, the context moves in the direction of mutuality between slave and master. He says at the end of Ephesians 6:8, 9 that slaves and the free will be treated in the same way at the final judgement, and that there is no favouritism with the heavenly master to whom both are ultimately subject. Second, there was a strong conviction in early Christianity, originating in the teaching of Jesus, that those in positions of authority should adopt the role of slaves with respect to those under their authority (John 13:13-16). The author was aware of this ethic of mutual service (cf. also Gal 5:13; 1 Cor 9:19), and it is likely that the mutual submission articulated to the head of the household code (in Eph 5:21) is indeed indebted to it (Best 1998:583). Third, the theology of Ephesians 1-3 is deeply indebted to the notion that human beings are united with one another in their rebellion against God (Eph 2:2-3, 11-12; 4:17-19, 22; 5:7-8a), but also in the opportunity to become newly created human beings through faith in God (Eph 2:10,14-22; 4:23-24). Hoehner (2002:810) states:

(I)t could convey the idea that the goal of performance is strictly to impress the master and to leave undone anything which would not be noticed by him. It thus refers to the outward activity of work without the corresponding inward dedication. Reconsidering the author's directive to slaves in light of his instructions to masters, an alternative to the common reading becomes apparent. He is drawing a distinction between living by the flesh and by the spirit.

Their masters 'according to the flesh' may command their labour and must be obeyed, but the enslaved should not fear their masters. Slaves are no longer to live in fear of their masters' coercive power or strive to please their masters to enlarge their own power base. They were slaves of Christ and, as they served God from the soul, God would provide for them himself.

Walking also had the connotation of exercising righteousness and justice, as illustrated in Genesis 18:19. In Genesis 18:19 the two words are paired to form a comprehensive phrase (like the modern term 'law and order'). According to Wright (2009:91) the nearest English



expression to the Hebrew double-word phrase would be 'social justice'. Thus, the Old Testament understanding of righteousness and justice are actual actions that you do, not concepts that one reflects on, or an ideal that one dreams about.

We are reminded by Smedes (1993:3) that to be able to do this, we must have the following:

The power to do this is agape love. Agape does God model the love in his relations with sinners, the love that drove Jesus to the cross? Agape love is the liberating power that moves us towards our neighbour with no demand for rewards. Do not ask whether you are able to love: without thought of reward. Just understand that God's love is the power to move us in that direction.

Conclusion

By framing the Ephesian household code with the statements of Ephesians 5:21 and 6:9, a challenging new interpretive framework is presented. Just as in the household of God, so also in the domestic household, the commonly held perspective of the day on the relationships between wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters, is viewed from a new perspective 'submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:21). Indeed, Ephesians 5:21 'stands as a superscription to the entire *Haustafeln* and qualifies the submission urged upon the wives, children and slaves, as well as the authority of the husbands, fathers and masters' (Sampley, 1971:158). It has been argued that walking or living in love and living wisely suggest mutuality rather than hierarchy in the Christian community.

Each new generation has to interpret the insights of the past for its own situation. The biblical traditions come to us in a form that reflects life in a particular cultural and social world. Unless we understand the cultural and social world of the biblical texts, we cannot be addressed by them.

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